

CraftHER

LiA 2024 Information Session for Laidlaw Scholars

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SWARA
VOICE OF WOMEN



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Introducing Swara



[Listen to Swara's origin story in this TedX Talk by Asha, our founder](#)

We're on a mission to bring **Indian** mysticism to the global stage through ethical & *stylish* Fashion.



Source: [Indian handicrafts goes back to almost 5000 years from now.](#)



SWARA

VOICE OF WOMEN

Building a global community
of
empowered **women**
empowering **women**

We are not just a concept. Please head to [Instagram](#) to see our community!



Some really **cool** ambassadors & prestigious institutions have recognised us!



swara - Voice of Women



swaravow



1,676 Posts

25 k Followers

2,252 Following

Swara - Voice of Women

Clothing (brand)

Apparel handcrafted by Wonder Women ⚡



The Current Product

Indian prints + modern silhouettes

- Handprinted
- 100% cotton
- Tailored by Women
- Co-designed by global young designers & rural women artisans

The Story

Each product comes with a **postcard** introducing you to the artisans in the supply chain.



Swara

Postcard

OUR STORY

Swara - Voice of Women's mission is to unleash the incredible and un-utilised talent of rural women (the greatest untapped resource in the world!) We are a sustainable fashion brand working with groups of Wonder-Women who have exceptional creativity and stitching talent but unfortunately have nowhere to sell their products locally and don't understand urban markets as they are so far away!

We give the Wonder-Women an opportunity for a sustainable and consistent income by selling their beautiful handmade garments to urban conscious customers like you. We work tirelessly to ensure each garment tells a unique story of the woman who made it - her dreams, her love and her quiriness of course! Every time you wear our clothes we want you to feel special and beautiful! Your purchase goes a long way to give *her* an above market income, agency, and power!



Your purchase is her power!

Everytime you post about us on social media, you amplify her voice.



@swaravow | swaravow.com

WHO MADE YOUR CLOTHES?

Material was handprinted by _____

Apparel was stitched by _____

SPECIAL CLOTHES NEED SPECIAL CARE

Characteristic imperfections associated with handblock printing may be observed, and colours may fade or bleed due to the traditional dyeing and printing process employed.

Hand wash separately or dry clean | Iron On Reverse | Do Not Bleach

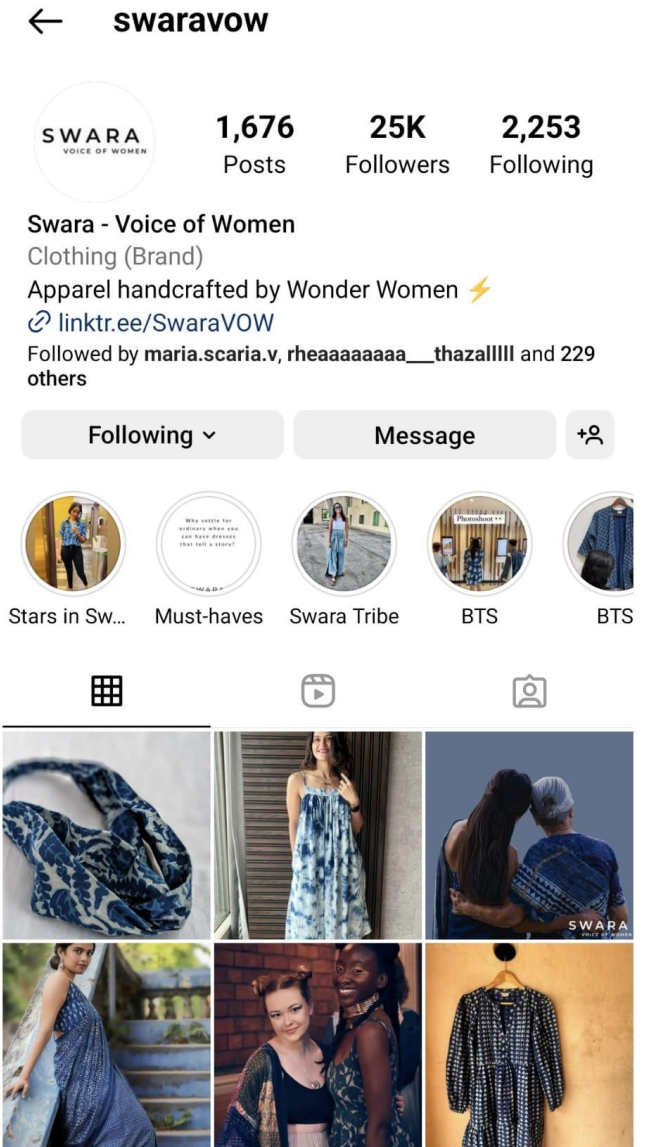
Our Community

- [Instagram](#): 25 K
- [Facebook](#): 2.5 K
- [LinkedIn](#): 1.3 K
- Newsletter Subscribers: 2K

We have grown organically: through word-of-mouth, free PR, collaborations etc.

Our customers are staunch believers in our values of women empowerment and slow fashion.

We have had a customer name her adopted daughter Swara, another who went to pursue her MBA because she wanted to start something like Swara and many young women who write to us to let us know what the first purchase they're making with their first salary is Swara.



Our Impact

Employ

women tailors with a remuneration above market price; provide them with creative autonomy; and train them in the latest industry know-how.

Empower

rural women to break out of their stereotypical roles by giving them opportunities in modelling, marketing and mentor-ship.

Educate

people globally about sustainable development goals; gender equality, sustainable consumption, inclusive economic growth.

We work closely with cooperatives of women tailors and have partnerships with prestigious organisations in this space to ensure that we can smoothly scale operations in the coming months. We source our fabrics directly from a family of artisans ensuring that money goes directly into the hands of the stakeholders we want to empower. We track our impact on their lives in a qualitative and quantitative way to ensure we're heading the right direction.



Swara Labs

SWARA
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The Idea: Swara labs are experience centers in rural India where interns from top global business, fashion and social studies schools come to co-create with rural women artisans.

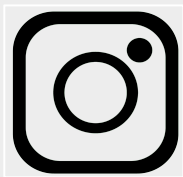
So far, students have come from:



The Swara **Woman**

Empowered Women Empower Women

Swara's target customers are women above the age of 25, who are environmentally cautious, green-friendly, supporters of ethical fashion and global citizens. We are looking to focus on those that care about incorporating environmentally-friendly products, and who are willing to pay a bit more for clothing that is sustainable and does not exploit workers.



Where we **fit**

We want to be at the sweet spot of Ethical + Affordable + Stylish. It's clear from the recent articles in the news that Ethical Fashion industry is booming.

 Fashion United

Sustainability platform Green Story secures 1.1 million euros in funding

... a platform enabling fashion brands to measure and communicate their sustainability efforts, has raised 1.1 million euros in funding.



17 Mar 2022

 City AM

Activewear brand TALA raises £4.2m as it woos shoppers fed up with fast fashion

Gen Z-orientated sustainable activewear brand TALA has raised £4.2m in ... News of the funding comes amid a huge boom for the activewear...



2 Feb 2022

 Vogue Business

Sustainable sourcing startup Material Exchange raises €25 million

... materials — has raised €25 million in Series A funding to grow its operations as a sustainable material provider for fashion brands.



1 month ago

Ethical

Affordable

Non-profits

SWARA
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Reformation

ZARA

Stylish

Fashion Show at the **Oxford** Union

We were one of the 5 brands participating in the first-ever Fashion Show at the Oxford Union, in 2022.

[Click to purchase this dress](#)



Loved by Priyanka Chopra Jonas

As read on Vogue: “When women are financially empowered, they can transform families, communities and countries,” wrote Chopra on August 15, when she marked our 74th Independence Day by celebrating sustainable income and empowerment in pandemic-struck 2020.

Her favourites include Swara - Voice of Women, a handcrafted clothing label that employs women tailors in Rajasthan...

[Click to read the vogue article](#)





Unleash Partnership

We supplied Tote Bags with Swara branding on the inside of the bags, to 1000 Unleash Talents from all over the world in 2018.

[Click to read more about the Laidlaw Foundation](#)

UNLEASH Global Innovation Lab Singapore 2018

In May 2018, UNLEASH invited 1,000 Talents from all over the world to create real, scalable solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals in Singapore.

They spent one week going through a facilitated process of innovation, uniquely tailored by UNLEASH and Deloitte. Alongside the innovation process, they explored the city of Singapore and attended inspirational talks by several Singaporean and international speakers, so that they would unlock new perspectives and enrich their SDG solutions.

This is the brand
Reformation

Next Steps for the brand

Brand Renewal & New Collection

In 2018, our unique product advantage set us apart, but with the growing ease of launching D2C brands, we've lost our edge in Indigo dabu and shibori fabrics. To regain our status, we're creating a fresh collection featuring environmentally conscious materials, embracing a global, sexy, [Reformation](#)-inspired aesthetic.

Increase Marketing in India

We are **quirky**, fun and engaging with our marketing and the Indian audience seem to love what we've done so far. We want to do more of the innovative marketing that we've done in the past - like the photography competition we held for college students.

Global Expansion



CraftHER

SWARA
VOICE OF WOMEN

- Project Duration: 6 Weeks
 - Tentative dates: 24th June to 2nd August 2023
- Location: Kerala, India

Project Objectives

1. Empower rural women artisans in Kerala, India, by enhancing their income opportunities in the art and craft sector.
2. Preserve and promote traditional art and craft forms of Kerala through sustainable entrepreneurship.
3. Foster cross-cultural understanding and global awareness.

Project Deliverables:

1. Improved income-generating opportunities for rural women artisans in Kerala.
2. Enhanced product quality and marketing strategies.
3. Cultural exchange and cross-cultural understanding.
4. Documentation of project impact and lessons learned.

Risk Assessment

While Kerala is a relatively low-risk region.

Cultural and Language Barriers: Scholars may experience difficulties in adjusting to the local culture and language differences, leading to potential misunderstandings.

Mitigation Strategies:

- Scholars will undergo a week-long cultural immersion training (Week 0) before engaging in community projects. Experienced translators and cultural liaisons will be available to assist with language and cultural barriers.
- Cross-cultural orientation sessions will be integrated into the program.

Project Ratings

1. Social & Political Situation: 2/5
2. Challenging Physical Environment: 2/5
3. Complexity (Including Cultural Complexity, Project Structure, and Innovation): 3/5
4. Group or Individual Based: Group-Based
5. Level of Individual Initiative Required: 4/5

Weekly Project Plan

Week 0: Orientation and Immersion (Days 1-7)

- Introduction to Kerala's art and craft heritage.
- Immersion in local artisan communities.
- Cultural exchange and building rapport with artisans.
- Preliminary scoping of challenges and opportunities.
- SWOT analysis: Identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Week 1: Needs Assessment (Days 8-14)

- In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with women artisans.
- Understanding their specific needs and aspirations.
- Evaluating the state of their existing businesses.
- Identifying areas where scholars' skills can make an impact.

Week 2: Business Planning (Days 15-21)

- Collaborating with artisans to develop tailored business plans.
- Financial forecasting, budgeting, and cost optimization.
- Marketing strategies, branding, and market positioning.
- Identifying potential market connections and partners.

Weekly Project Plan

Week 3: Skill Enhancement (Days 22-28)

- Providing skill development workshops for artisans in business development and marketing.
- Introducing innovative marketing and sales techniques.
- Encouraging creative thinking and problem-solving.

Week 4: Implementation (Days 29-35)

- Putting the action plans into motion.
- Collaborating with artisans to improve product quality, design, and sales.
- Launching marketing and sales activities locally and online.

Week 5: Scaling and Sustainability (Days 36-42)

- Assessing the impact of improvements made during the project.
- Collecting feedback from artisans, local communities, and customers.
- Creating a roadmap for scaling the artisan businesses.
- Discussing long-term sustainability, including cooperative models and market expansion.

Post-Project:

- Monitoring the progress of their businesses and offering guidance as needed.
- Evaluating the overall impact on the women artisans' economic empowerment and well-being.
- Sharing success stories and lessons learned to inspire future initiatives.

Accommodation

Scholars will stay at a homestay which is located in Kottayam, Kerala.

- Accommodation will be arranged in shared rooms with 2 scholars per room.
- Accommodation will include basic amenities such as:
 - flush toilets & showers attached to the bedroom
 - high-speed internet
 - safe drinking water
 - towels & bedding
 - safes - to lock valuables
 - laundry facilities
 - clean drinking water
 - a kitchen
 - a dining area.



Meals

- Scholars are responsible for their food expenses, granting them flexibility in dining choices.
- Meals can be arranged at the accommodation, with direct payment to the homestay, allowing scholars to pre-order breakfast and/or dinner.
- Alternatively, numerous dining and food delivery options are available in proximity to the accommodation and workplace.



Other Logistics

Work Location

- Scholars will primarily work out of the Swara Office for project coordination, meetings, and workshops.
 - Address: Swara-Voice of Women, Thekkiniyil house, peroor. P. O Ettumanoor. 686637
- Second workspace is available at the NGO facility of Archana
- Remote Artisan Clusters:
 - Project activities will also take place in remote artisan clusters located in Kollam and Kochi, both approximately 100 kilometers away from the accommodation.

Timing for Work & Leisure

- Workdays are scheduled from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM on weekdays.
- Leisure and cultural immersion activities will be organized during evenings and weekends.
- Scholars will have designated leisure time to explore local attractions and relax.

Medical Facilities

- The nearest hospital, Caritas Hospital, is located at 9 KM from the accommodation.
- An emergency medical kit will be available at the accommodation.
- Emergency medical contact information will be shared with scholars.

Transportation

- Transportation between accommodation and the workplace will be provided through organized transportation services.

Key Scholar Benefits

1. **Global Exposure and Cultural Immersion:** Scholars will immerse themselves in the vibrant culture of Kerala, India, gaining a deep appreciation for the local art and craft traditions. This cultural immersion will broaden their horizons and enhance their cross-cultural understanding, a valuable skill in our interconnected world.
2. **Hands-On Business Experience: CraftHER** provides a unique opportunity to apply their skills in business development, marketing, and sales in a real-world context. Scholars will actively participate in crafting business plans, conducting market research, and implementing strategies, equipping them with practical experience and enhancing their entrepreneurial skills.
3. **Social Impact and Empowerment:** Working closely with rural women artisans, scholars will witness the direct impact of their efforts on the women's lives and communities. This experience will foster a sense of social responsibility and empathy, motivating scholars to become advocates for ethical and sustainable initiatives.
4. **Leadership and Problem-Solving:** Scholars will take on leadership roles within the project, guiding and mentoring artisans. This experience will enhance their leadership and problem-solving abilities as they address unique challenges faced by the artisans and help them navigate the path to economic empowerment.
5. **Global Citizenship and Ethical Business Understanding:** Scholars will actively contribute to a social enterprise with a commitment to ethical and sustainable practices. They will gain a deep understanding of how ethical fashion and lifestyle products are created, from production to market connections. This knowledge aligns with growing global trends towards responsible and sustainable consumption.

In summary, participation in **CraftHER** offers Laidlaw Scholars a transformative journey that combines cultural immersion, practical business experience, social impact, leadership development, and a heightened sense of global citizenship. It's an opportunity to not only shape the lives of rural women artisans but also to shape their own perspectives and skills, preparing them for a future marked by global awareness and ethical entrepreneurship.

Expectations

- Inaugural Scholars:
Co-create the program
with Swara
- Stay flexible
- Stay entrepreneurial
- New culture



FAQ:

1. From when to when does the project take place? Also, if there is Week 0 for cultural training, does the project last for 7 weeks instead of 6 weeks?

Answer: Tentatively, the dates are 24th June to 2nd August 2024. There will be a total of 6 weeks with week 0 being reserved for cultural training and the remaining 5 weeks for hands-on work on the field.

2. What exactly do scholars do in the project? What kind of work, in what areas, what skills do I need?

Answer: In the CraftHER project, scholars play a pivotal role across various domains outlined in the Weekly Project Plan. The work encompasses critical areas such as business development, marketing, and product enhancement. If you possess an entrepreneurial spirit, have a passion for fashion, and are a staunch advocate for women's empowerment, this Leadership in Action (LiA) opportunity is tailor-made for you!

3. Could you describe the accommodation? E.g. what type of accommodation, environments etc. Would you describe the living environment physically and culturally challenging?

Answer: The accommodation offers a comfortable and safe living environment without physical or cultural challenges. Scholars will stay at a homestay in Kottayam, Kerala, with a capacity for 12 individuals. Accommodations consist of shared rooms for two scholars, equipped with basic amenities such as attached toilets, high-speed internet, laundry facilities, clean drinking water, a kitchen, and a dining area. The focus is on providing a practical and convenient living space for scholars to concentrate on their project work.

FAQ:

4. The ideal Laidlaw Scholar for the CraftHER Project is a dynamic, compassionate, and driven undergraduate student with a profound commitment to women's empowerment and a genuine passion for ethical fashion and production.

Answer: The ideal Laidlaw Scholar for the CraftHER Project possesses a diverse skill set and personal attributes essential for effective project contribution. This scholar should exhibit cultural sensitivity and an entrepreneurial spirit, actively engaging in business development and marketing activities. A strong advocate for women's empowerment, the scholar should have analytical skills, effective communication, and the ability to build relationships with artisans and local communities. Additionally, the scholar should be adaptable, committed to ethical practices, and possess project management skills. A passion for the fashion industry, a global perspective, and a willingness to collaborate round out the profile, contributing to the holistic approach of the CraftHER Project.

5. Why should a student be flown into India to work on CraftHER? Why can't we just send the money spent on the project directly to the community?

Answer: While sending funds directly to the community can have a positive impact, the CRAFTHER Project offers a unique and holistic learning experience that goes beyond financial support. It provides scholars with the opportunity to immerse themselves in a new culture, work directly with local artisans and women, and develop leadership and intercultural skills that are invaluable for their personal and academic growth. This hands-on experience not only benefits the scholars but also creates a meaningful connection between international students and the community of artisans. When international students collaborate with artisans, it fosters a rich exchange of ideas, knowledge, and creativity. This interaction brings fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to the community, enhancing their craft and business practices. Moreover, the students become ambassadors for these artisans, sharing their stories and creations with a global audience, which can lead to increased exposure and sales for the artisans' products. Ultimately, it's not just about giving money; it's about empowering the next generation of leaders with real-world experiences and perspectives while simultaneously providing artisans with opportunities for skill enhancement, market expansion, and cultural exchange. The CRAFTHER Project aims to create a win-win situation where both scholars and the community of artisans benefit from this meaningful collaboration.

Next Steps

1. Have more questions? Write to us at admin@swaravow.com
2. Apply for this LiA by filling [this](#) form
 - We have a total of 12 spots available for 2024 LiA

A clothing brand works with artisan clusters of women in rural India providing them with sustained employment



Threads of change (Clockwise from left) Asha Scaria, the artisans of Dungarpur and a model in a Swara Sari • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

basic tailoring, owned sewing machines and had been sewing for local customers. It took some convincing over several rounds of conversations with them – as groups and individually too.

Although the women had been stitching, they were put through a month's up-skilling so that their work would be on a par with what is available online.

The first collection was made of indigo-dyed, Dabu fabric – a mud-resist, block technique – sourced from artisans in nearby Akola. The engagement continues, Swara brands and markets saris the artisans make.

Asha has already established a rapport with the women as part of her work related to the Gandhi Fellowship. Explaining the idea of online shopping took some time, all devices at hand – smartphones and tablets – were put to use to show how it works. While Swara has trained 40 tailors, it has worked with more than 70 tailors (artisans) directly or through NGOs. The number of tailors the brand works with has come down due to the lockdown.

Currently Swara works with clusters identified by SEWA Bharat, a federation of women-led institutions which works towards providing economic and social support for women. Asha works with NGOs that have already mobilised women artisans. Swara works with women in need of support – women in rural and/or tribal areas or survivors of human trafficking.

The core areas are product development and marketing. "We help take the artisan's product to the consumer. Product development is the key, as is understanding the market. We want to help the women who get left behind," she says.

She started with an Instagram handle (@swaravow) and built a base. Swara is registered as a 'for-profit social enterprise' as she wants to show that a sustainable model, with

Power to the women



SHILPA NAIR ANAND

When Asha Scaria, founder of ethical clothing brand Swara VOW (Voice of Women), broached the idea of an online portal for garments stitched by the women from the tribal communities of Dungarpur, it was met with scepticism.

"The women were suspicious of the idea: they wondered whether, and how it would work. The concept of e-commerce – selling and buying online – was foreign to them. They could not understand how that could happen, and why anybody outside Dungarpur would buy what they made," says Asha. Two years later, not only has the brand provided sustained employment to women employed by it, but also created in them a sense of empowerment.

Actors Priyanka Chopra and Bhumi Pednekar have mentioned the brand on their socials. "The recognition empowers the women and makes them feel that they can do

today's and transmitters of traditional knowledge, designs and manufacturing techniques.

Asha says preservation of culture – cultural sustainability – is perceived as the 'luxury pillar' of the sustainability movement. Cultural sustainability is defined as the preservation of culture – beliefs, practices, and heritage among other aspects. "What happens to culture when we are done dealing with the

more pressing sustainability issues? What if there is no culture left to preserve?" she asks.

The brand pivots on the artisan who is acknowledged as an equal partner. In this case women artisans. "We want to enable and empower them," she says. "The women work from home; they don't have to step out and they set the pace. This way there is no reason for them to sacrifice their jobs and it keeps them employed, empowered," says Asha, who hails from Ettumanoor in Kerala.

Asha embarked on the project in 2018, when she was in Dungarpur doing the Gandhi Fellowship. It [the Fellowship] grooms fellows to become 'change leaders' to initiate change in existing social and public systems. Asha had been interacting



Press Coverage: Swara's Inspiring Story Makes Headlines

Come join us.

Apply for this LiA by filling [this](#) form.

"You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand."

- Woodrow Wilson

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